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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION: TAIWAN'S REFERENDA

Summary: As the result of last Saturday's legislative elections continued to remain in the spotlight of the Taiwan media, news coverage on January 15 also focused on Taiwan's announcement Monday that it has terminated its 42-year-long diplomatic relations with Malawi after the latter switched its diplomatic recognition from Taipei to Beijing; on President Chen Shui-bian's meeting with AIT Chairman Raymond Burghardt during his stopover in Anchorage; and on DPP presidential candidate Frank Hsieh's taking over the DPP chairmanship Monday. The centrist, KMT-leaning "China Times" devoted nearly its entire second page to an exclusive news story and analyses of the 28-hour-long confrontation between USS Kitty Hawk aircraft carrier and a Chinese submarine and destroyer in late November, 2007. In terms of editorials and commentaries, an editorial in the mass-circulation "Apple Daily," citing the results of the two referenda in Saturday's elections, urged DPP presidential candidate Frank Hsieh to take the lead in withdrawing the proposed UN referendum, which will be held in tandem with the March presidential poll. End summary.

"The Two [New] Referenda Should Be Withdrawn"

The mass-circulation "Apple Daily" [circulation: 500,000] editorialized (1/15):

"... One significant point [in Saturday's legislative elections] was overlooked: namely, the voters' attitude toward the referenda. [Last Saturday,] both referenda failed to pass the threshold [for validity], but for the referendum aimed at recovering the ill-gotten [KMT] party assets, a total of 4.55 million ballots were picked up by the voters, and a total of 4.5 million voters also picked up the referendum ballots against corruption in government. Such a phenomenon indicated that at least more than four million people took the referenda seriously and did not follow the KMT's call for voters not to pick up the referendum ballots. Given such a huge number of voters who decided for themselves not to pay attention to the KMT's [call], will it have no influence on the [March] presidential poll?

"The fact that only 26 percent of the eligible voters picked up the referendum ballots indicated the voters' negative impression with the DPP's attempt to bundle the referendum with the elections every time. But the fact that four million voters picked up the [referendum] ballots also manifested the voters' disgust with the KMT's 'last-minute decision to abandon' the referendum. [The two referenda] on recovering the KMT's ill-gotten party assets and on an anti-corruptive government, respectively, were justifiable in terms of social justice. It's a pity that they were used by politicians for political gains and thus rejected by the voters. ...

"A-bian has stepped down [in his capacity as DPP chairman], and Frank Hsieh decided to take his own road. Hsieh could take the lead and withdraw the proposed UN referendum, and the KMT meanwhile can withdraw its own referendum proposal [for the March presidential

poll] as well. Cancellation of the two bogus referendum topics will not only win the people's heart but also save a lot of money for our country."

YOUNG